

**William Short to Thomas Jefferson, December 29,
1807, from the Thomas Jefferson and William Short
Correspondence, Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W.
Gawalt, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**

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Philadelphia Dec. 29. 1807

Dear Sir

I had the pleasure of acknowledging on the 25th ulto. your favor of the 15th. Since then I have seen that Mr Bowdoin has left France. Not knowing whether the interposition of Bonaparte, mentioned by you, had produced its effect, I supposed if it had not, that Mr. B's departure indicated its not being counted on for the present. It appeared to me at the same time that Mr. B's return left a vacancy, & at a time when, if ever, my wishes to operate in a business in which I formerly labored for others, might be gratified.

I was reflecting on this state of things when I heard of the secret deliberations of Congress which have terminated in an embargo. Being unacquainted with the precise situation in which we now stand, with France, & the light in which you view it, I am uncertain what I ought to say to you thereon, on whether I should say anything. Moments of crises however are certainly those in which the greatest services can be rendered. And if I had not hope, grounded on circumstances peculiar to myself, of rendering service, I really would not wish, much less ask what I have done, either on your account or my own. I would prefer that the scene of action should be placed at Paris, because it is really the true point d'appui. Even if any kind of issue has taken place there since the promised interposition, which would seem to make it desperate at present, yet I do not think it

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should be abandoned. The scene changes so often on that theatre that it is perhaps immediately after a cloud, that fair weather may be looked for; and a person on the spot to take advantage of the passing moment might perhaps find one favorable & succeed.

As to their real views, I am sure I could ascertain them with great precision from my acquaintance with some of these who are in power & others in contact with them. I have no objection to being associated with MGenl. Armstrong, as I do not at all apprehend the same state as between him & Mr. B. You may perhaps be averse to sending another joint commission on a business on which he waited so long, as far as I know, in vain-but I am really not without hope that I could obtain some modification to the moyens d'exécution of the decrees of November. I do not mean to say that I hope to change this man's

ideas—nobody aims at that in a direct way-my hope is this-that as the decree will produce an effect in France different from what he contemplated, & as of those who approach him, some wish already, & others even will wish that it could be modified, I could be being on the spot & observing the operation of this, be instrumental in the modification.

There are two men of influence who approach him, & who, I know, have confidence in me, & would communicate freely & unreservedly with me. If anything can be effected it must be by this kind of communication & not be diplomatic distrust-creating memoires à consulter, proving that this or that is contrary to moral right. Place a Cicero there at present without a knowledge of the language or with it, & without the means of unreserved confidential personal communication & he would do little more than Genl. A. has done with the aid of coadjutor Mr. B.

I have just received a letter of a late date from that country by the Revenge, in which I am indebted to the circumstance of the person who commands at Cherbourg & who is a man in high present rank, being the particular friend of one of mine, & who gave notice of this occasion that letters might be sent me. My letter states that it is believed at Paris that Mr. Monroe is to be your successor, & adds a hope that from his knowledge of the resent

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situation of that Country, & of me, he will take a different view of the advantages I should have there, from what has been hither to done. I should add that this is from a person who is particularly partial to me, but who has much at heart a good understanding between the two countries. I am unacquainted, as I have said, with the present relative situation of this country & France; but of this I am certain & I think you will agree with me, that from the character of Bonaparte-his power-his multifarious & gigantic views there never was a moment when it could be more important for the U.S. to have near him a vedette acquainted with all the byepaths, who would thus, if he could not avert an impending danger, be able to discover it sooner & give the earliest information of the necessity of preparing for it. I speak of this in our general relations with him & without regard to the particular affair of Florida. Allowing Genl. A. all the talents his most partial friends can wish, & surely I am not disposed to depreciate them, yet he must be there morally sourd & muet & moreover aveugle ré to a certain degree, so as that he cannot possibly by chance see anything until it shall have burst out to light & become visible to all-of course when the danger is more pressing the remedy more difficult.

If you should think with me that it is

worth-while to make this agreement I shall be willing to return the charge on to the hands of your successor as soon as he shall please. It is from you I would wish to hold this mark of confidence & from your answers to the Legislatures of this & other States, I see that the possibility of this now remains but for a short time.

This circumstance & the return of Monroe, which does away the objection of Virginianism, tell me that, this is the most favorable, if not the only moment for my wishes. If I had not the prospect of public advantage, as well as my own gratification in view, I really would not ask this of you, but as my gratification would be real, so my gratitude would be sincere.

I have already mentioned my fears that, in time when passions are so high, & when hatred is so much more readily excited than friendship or confidence, my presence might be more

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hurtful that beneficial. I have really no reliance but on that confidence which the members of the body in question have in you, & on that which, if I deserve it, you have in me. In your present situation is it possible that a majority would not be guided by you on a subject where they must feel that your view cannot fail to be more comprehensive & more intense than theirs.

I regret, as I have more than once said, that I have not regularly taken up my winterquarters at Washington. Could I have been accommodated with tolerable comfort in my situation, I should have preferred it to any other from every consideration. In all countries, the seat of government, caeteris paribus is the residence which holds out the most inducements.

The Envoy expected from England I find is the person of that name whom I saw for a short time during my residence at the Hague in 92. He came there as a kind of secy. or rather pupil to Ld. Auckland. He seemed a sensible & well disposed young man. Ld. Auckland spoke highly of him, but that he would have done of course as his father was then the right hand of Mr. Pitt. A report has come here that he has been taken by the French Ship, Le Patriote, off our coast. I have just heard it merely as a report.

Mr. Monroe I see is at Washington. I shall write to congratulate him & enquire how long he will remain there, as I shall have no other opportunity of seeing him. The reception he has met with at Richmond gives pleasure here to those whom I have heard speak of it as they think it will increase his chance for the chair of government. It is said the Federal interest will be for him throughout the Union. If this be well established, I should suppose it would injure him with the great majority

of the country. And Mr. Fulton who arrived here lately from Washington, notwithstanding he was much among the leading members of Congress, says that he never once heard any other name than those of Clinton & Madison, mentioned as candidates. He says the idea seemed to be that if there were war Clinton should be chosen-if not-not. Of course

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it would be Mr. Madison. I suppose it will be decided at Washington before the rising of Congress who will be supported by the Republican interest- therefore who will be elected.

I have seen or heard of several articles in the papers acidtone to Gl. Moreau's visit to N. Orleans. A short time will shew that he had not other view that to dissipate the gloom which for the first time had taken possession of a mind which had resisted all its former shocks. The loss of his only son seems to have destroyed for a time all the energy of his mind. The departure of his wife also in a state of mind approaching despaire increased his sufferings. The idea of a visit to N. Orleans was a sudden one. He passed rapidly through this City on account of the advanced season, & intends to return by sea to Charleston in February, from thence by land to New-York, where his only remaining child is in the family of a friend.

It is still my intention to pay you a visit in January. I have some business here which will make my presence necessary about the middle of that month, as soon as possible after its determination I will set out. I will write before hand to Mr. Cutts to ask him to endeavour to procure me lodgings in his house. Be pleased to accept the assurance of sentiments which you have so long known, & believe me most sincerely & respectfully yours, WShort

RC (Jefferson Papers, DLC)